

CHAPTER XII

MACAULAY'S CHARACTER OF JAMES !!

READERS of Macaulay's History must often have wondered whether James was as black as he is painted there, James is not given a full-length portrait. When he is first mentioned his character is summed up in two lines: ' Though a libertine, James was diligent, methodical, and fond of authority and business. His understanding" was singularly slow and narrow, and his temper obstinate, harsh, and unforgiving/ ' After this preliminary estimate Macaulay dwells at length, first on one feature of James's character and then on another, as opportunity offers, leaving the reader to collect from these partial glimpses and from the acts recorded his own estimate of the King's character. The acts are generally discreditable and the comments unfavourable.

To begin with, it is certain that Macaulay underrates the ability of James II—that is, his administrative, not his political ability. He made a good Lord High Admiral, and the navy was better administered by him than by the commissioners who took his place after the passing of the Test Act in 1673. During his short reign he did much to restore the fleet which Charles II had allowed to fall into a state of disorganisation and decay* On this point the evidence of Pepys is consistent and conclusive.

Another favourable witness is the Duke of Wellington.

In one of his conversations with Lord

Stanhope he said: